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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, February 8, focuses on US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, as well as reports anticipating the quadrilateral summit meeting scheduled for Tuesday in Sharm El-Sheikh.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Positive indication on the path towards a solution"

Columnist Ali Safadi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/08): "The Sharm El-Sheikh summit represents an important step on the path towards revitalizing the peace process, leading to the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state.. The speed of political activities in the region and the rise of these positive indications constitute a good beginning for resuming the negotiations. An extensive Arab effort in support of the Palestinian negotiators is now required. The negotiations also require continued seriousness on the part of the U.S. administration and the quadrilateral parties to help achieve a settlement for the conflict and to pressure Israel to respond to the requirements of peace."

-- "Sharm El-Sheikh summit is designed to handle the details"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/08): "If the United States is required to cease its blind bias for Israel and to support the establishment of the Palestinian state, then what is required of Jordan and Egypt that are taking part in the Sharm El-Sheikh summit? The Sharm El-Sheikh summit is expected to handle certain details (such as) formulating the Palestinian and Egyptian role for the time when Israel begins to implement its plan for withdrawal from Gaza. There has always been talk of an Egyptian security role in Gaza as an alternative to Sharon's refusal to reach a security agreement with the Palestinians. The requirement now is for the summit to give back to the Palestinians their role in handling security and political arrangements in Gaza after the withdrawal of the Israelis. This is because security and peace (in the Palestinian areas) are Palestinian-Israeli issues and not Egyptian-Israeli issues. As for the West Bank, talk about it seems to be postponed until after the withdrawal from Gaza. This is why any talk about a Jordanian security role in the West Bank would be premature. Despite this, the Jordanian political role is no less important.. What distinguishes Sharm El-Sheikh summit from other summits is the fact that the policy of confrontation and escalation that Sharon had adopted for the past four years has been exhausted. In addition, the nature of the coming steps that need to be taken are now clear. The Palestinian cease-fire must be accompanied by Israeli withdrawals and the return to the negotiating table in order to achieve a goal that has been known to everyone in the world, namely the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. Without the establishment of this state, there will be no peace."

HALE